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Sustainability Strategies for Small Business Survival Beyond 5 Years

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Webster University, 2009

BS, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Owners of small retail businesses who fail to implement adequate managerial strategies experience reduced profits and sustainability challenges. Small businesses account for 85.3% of the market, and 66% of small businesses fail within the first 5 years due to low sales and personnel issues. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the managerial strategies that owners of successful small retail businesses implemented to sustain their operations for longer than the first 5 years. The population for the study included owners of 3 small retail businesses in the southeastern region of the United States, who successfully implemented managerial strategies and remained in business for longer than 5 years. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with the owners and from a review of the company websites and social media pages. Systems theory and the general systems theory was the conceptual framework for the study. Data were analyzed in accordance with Yin's 5-phase data analysis process consisting of pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, program logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: updating the business model, addressing customer feedback, and enhancing business efficiency. The findings of this study could contribute to positive social change by providing insights for owners of small retail businesses regarding strategy execution for managerial approaches that increase business productivity, which may lead to the improved economic wellbeing of some employees as well as positive contributions to the communities retail businesses serve.

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Dedication

I dedicate this phenomenal achievement to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has led and guided me throughout this journey. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). To my one and only son, Parker. Thank you for your patience and sacrifice throughout this journey. You are my inspiration. May this accomplishment encourage you to reach your highest dreams in life. To my dear mother, Patty, your kind words and sweet spirit has moved me along, especially on those days that I wanted to give up. Your level of support is unmatched. To my father, Eston, thank you for your constant prayers. Your prayers always came when I needed them most. To my twin sister Tamera, thanks for keeping me awake late at night while writing. Thanks to my brother, Michael (Tina) for your encouragement throughout this process. To my Kendall, thank you for standing in the gap for me. I appreciate all that you do! To my best friend, Tracie, you were just a phone call away when I needed to vent about my stressors. I am forever grateful and thankful for all of you.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Sustainability assessment is a conventional business activity that connects the strategy and commitment level of a business to a sustainable economy (Kassem, Trenz, Hrebicek, & Faldik, 2016). The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge from successful small retail business owners to understand the aspects that led to their success in the small business arena. By conducting interviews with business owners in the southeastern region of the United States, I gathered information future and currently-operating small retail businesses' could use for sustainability beyond the first 5 years. Small retail business in the region may benefit from this study's results regarding business proprietorship.

Background of the Problem

There is a multitude of small businesses in the United States. Small businesses consist of one to 499 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2015). Businesses of this size have shown to have the most growth for new businesses. According to Shields and Shelleman (2015), there is an urgency for small retail business owners to develop training strategies to promote sustainability. Some small business owners lack proper strategies for integrating sustainability issues into their business decisions (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). Some of the key factors that can cause sustainability issues are lack of innovation, lack of influence to promote change, and poor building of the organization (Muja, Walker, Ramadan, & Sodeyi, 2014).

Problem Statement

According to Freeman and Siegfried (2015), leaders and managers of small businesses receive minimum training, which can jeopardize business sustainability. Each year, employers spend approximately $171.5 billion on training; however, only 19% is allocated to managerial training and development (Sadler & Reysen, 2017). The general business problem is that small business owners who do not develop training initiatives for their managers may experience business closure. The specific business problem is that some small retail business owners lack strategies to appropriately train managers to sustain operations beyond the first 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore managerial training strategies that small retail business owners apply to sustain operation beyond the first 5 years. The targeted population of this study was three small retail businesses who developed efficacious managerial training strategies and remained sustainable beyond 5 years in the southeastern region of the United States. The contribution to positive social change may include beneficial implementation of training strategies, failure rate reduction, and increased economic growth of small businesses, all of which can reduce unemployment rates. The social impact of this study includes promotion of sustainability of existing small businesses in the community, which can influence the success of new businesses.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative method for this study. A qualitative researcher draws in-depth information from participants through interview techniques (Lyall & King, 2016). Researchers use the qualitative method to identify and remove obstacles to change (Grieb, Eder, Smith, Calhoun, & Tandon, 2015). The quantitative research method was not well suited for this study because it is mathematically based and does not allow respondents to include their lived experiences, beliefs, and public interactions (Grieb et al., 2015). Quantitative researchers use data to test theories, which also made this research method a poor choice for this study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). I chose not to use the mixed method because it included a quantitative component, which was not the method of choice for this study (Zhang & Watanabe-Galloway, 2014).

Qualitative research designs include case study, narrative study, ethnography, and phenomenology. For this research, I used a multiple case study. The case study researcher explores lived phenomena, which does not require random sampling (Ridder, 2017). An ethnographic design is used when researchers study individuals or groups of people based on their culture or their geographical location (Draper, 2015). The focus of this study was not on individual or group cultures; therefore, ethnographic design was not appropriate. Narrative researchers focus on listening to and understanding stories that are told, which may reflect participants' selves or experiences in their life in sequence (Joyce, 2015). The narrative design was not appropriate for the study because a life story may not influence business decisions in a specified time and space. Phenomenological design was not suited for this study because I wasn’t seeking to understand the essence of a phenomenon but rather explore strategies about the phenomena of study (Mutua & Van, 2015).

Research Question

This qualitative multiple case study had one central research question: What managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years?

Interview Questions

The interview questions focused on exploring how small retail business owners use training programs to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years.

1. How do you assess the effectiveness of your organization’s managerial training strategies and derivative programs?
2. What types of manager training initiatives are most effective?
3. How often do managers engage in training?
4. How responsive are managers to training?
5. What benefits do trained managers have on business performance and sustainability?
6. How does managerial training help you to retain employees?
7. What additional information can you provide to help me understand the training strategies and programs that are relevant to your organization’s success during the first 5 years of operations?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my study is systems theory. The systems theory was first developed by von Bertalanffy (1950) in the 1930s. General systems theory is a formulation that represents wholeness instead of individual parts (von Bertalanffy, 1950). It also focuses on concepts, models, and principles to scientifically explore the boundaries of science (von Bertalanffy, 1950). Researchers use the system theory model to categorize data that include living systems and social organizations, which exist in social environments such as small businesses (Peery, 1972). According to Rousseau (2015), the general systems theory can also be useful to encourage versatile communication, facilitate areas that lack theories, and increase knowledge that may assist in the cohesiveness of object- and subject-oriented disciplines.

Von Bertalanffy (1972) described the general systems model as an innate choice to open systems. Small businesses owners use various procedures to develop and maintain a lucrative business. The general systems theory highlights the strengths and weaknesses of small businesses as it relates to the mission set by small business owners (Bridgen, 2017). The systems theory can also be useful in identifying the functionality of business strategies such as training programs. In the domain of small business survival beyond the first 5 years, general systems theory is well suited to gaining an understanding of how past and current systems can be reproduced to address complications for existing small businesses.

Operational Definitions

Business agility: A component in achieving strategic advantages when businesses are faced with a variety of request from clients or customers (Stoica, Ghillic-Micu, Mircea, & Uscatu, 2016).

Corporate social responsibility: A corporation's initiatives to assess and take responsibility for the company's effects on environmental and social wellbeing (Vitell, 2015).

Ecological sustainability: A requirement for economic development which includes social equity and qualitative developments (Roseland & Spiliotopoulou, 2016).

Revenue diversification: A strategy that involves adding a product, services, location, customers and markets to a company's business portfolio (Kim, 2017).

Supply chain management: The process of reducing cost and maximizing the optimization of the production procedure (Langlois & Chauvel, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are unproven truths (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). Assumptions can carry risk, and in this study I treated them as though they carried risk. The first assumption for this study was that small business owners make decisions for their businesses regarding finances and investments to avoid having problems. The second assumption was that, as an interviewer, I aided in building a rapport with interviewees to ensure honesty, complexity of disclosure, and objectivity. The third assumption was that the qualitative methodology and multiple case study design was the best approach for this study.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses of the study (Morgado, Meireles, Neves, Amaral, & Ferreira, 2017). This study had one primary limitation—that the results cannot be generalized to all businesses in all settings. My focus on successful small retail business owners limit the research scope given the exclusion of unsuccessful small retail businesses. Also, the participants' responses may have included some biases.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the restrictions or opportunities of the study (Nelms, 2015). The participants of this study are owners of small businesses. There were two main delimitations for this study. The first delimitation was that the group of participants were limited to small business owners in the southeastern region of the United States. The second delimitation was that due to the geographical location of the participants, the results may not be conducive to small businesses that are located outside of the southeastern region.

Significance of the Study

Unemployment rates and declining work demands caused some families to struggle in the economy (Avendano & Noelke, 2015). Small business owners face limited resources, which can intensify the difficulty of remaining sustainable (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). Small business owners in the southeastern region of the United States may benefit by focusing on the managerial training strategies that other owners have successfully used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings of the study are valuable because they provide a deeper understanding of how small business owners in the southeastern region of the United States use managerial training programs to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years. The results of this study may highlight managerial training strategies that are helpful and ultimately contribute to the success of small businesses. With the right managerial training strategies, small business owners can make better decisions on how to sustain their business.

Implications for Social Change

The study may have implications for social change that apply to small businesses. Sserwang and Rooks (2014) found that of the small business owners' participants who closed shop, 57% anticipate starting a new business within 36 months; of these, 37.5% opened a new business. The sustainability of small businesses can aid in increasing the employment rates in the community and increase the economic growth of small businesses, which could benefit local communities by circulating money that consumers spend.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore managerial training strategies that small retail business owners apply to sustain operations beyond the first 5 years. Lack of managerial training strategies can jeopardize the sustainability of small retail businesses because of owners' lack of needed knowledge and skills (Froelich, 2015). The impact of local economic changes is felt quicker by small businesses, which can create problems with sustainability and can affect relationships with larger businesses (Johnson, Faught, & Long, 2017). The primary goal for my literature review was to explore the literature related to my study. Specifically, I used this exploration to help answer the central research question: What managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years?

Most of the information in my literature review is from peer-reviewed journals. The keywords that I focused on were *sustainability, sustainability strategies, retention strategies, supply chain management, communication, government regulations,* and *financial stability.* To find relevant information, I searched Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, and Emerald Management. Secondarily, I used ProQuest Central and ScienceDirect. I also used books, government publications, and dissertations. Of the 163 references, 154 (94%) were published within the 5 years (2014-2018) of my expected year of CAO approval, and 95% of the total references are peer-reviewed. The percentages listed in the table follow the DBA doctoral study rubric. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of reference types and their numerical value.

Table 1

Summary of Reference Types and Their Numerical Value

Source	Older	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total	Percentage
Peer-reviewed journals	10	11	42	31	43	17	154	94.48
Dissertations	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	.61
Government publications	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	.61
Textbooks	1	1	1	0	1	0	4	2.46
Non-peer-reviewed	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	1.84
Total	11	12	46	31	46	17	163	100

In this literature review section, I provide solid background information from studies that researchers conducted on managerial strategies and small retail business sustainability. The purpose of this literature review was to offer pertinent information about small business sustainability and survival beyond the first 5 years. I break down the literature review into the following subsections: (a) systems theory, (b) sustainability strategies, (c) principles of sustainability by business size, and (d) features of small business owners.

The Systems Theory

Systems theory was developed in the 1930s by von Bertalanffy (1972). Systems theory is used to assist business owners in exploring the relationships within their businesses. Von Bertalanffy pointed out that the systems theory involves both open and closed systems. Open systems are an avenue for business owners to gain pertinent information from within the functional environment. Closed systems do not allow business owners to connect outside of the current environment. Von Bertalanffy (1972) stated that personalities, social groups, and technological strategies are all components of systems theory. The pattern of relationships between parts of a system are key factors in understanding organizations such as small businesses (von Bertalanffy, 1972).

Bridgen (2017) stated that looking at systems in a holistic view illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of the systems that are based on the goals and missions of small businesses. Bridgen used the systems theory as a basis for the theoretical framework, which identifies problems regarding wholeness and social behavior. Small business problems break down into separate parts, but some business owners are blind-sided and do not recognize the relationships between the parts. For business owners to understand and sustain their business, they must understand the needs of the business and the interrelations of the business activities. According to Haye, Matus, Cottet, and Nino (2018), the organization of some small businesses involve active relationships among different structures that are hierarchically organized at various levels. This means that some business owners tolerate disorganization, avoid closure in the business environment, and primarily activate self-governance over multiple operations to make them work together.

Mania-Singer (2017) stated that the three key tenets of system theory are (a) structure of organizations, (b) open systems, and (c) interrelated subsystems. The structure of organizations comprises several subsystems that are interconnected and interrelated. Each interdependent subsystem depends on the other subsystems. Open systems are systems that influence larger environments. Interrelated subsystems function within a continuous response loop, which entails inputs/outputs, repetitious feedback, and transformation that takes place internally. Systems thinking is a concept that links the business owners' behaviors to their environment (Moore et al., 2018). For business owners to sustain their operations, there must be an understanding of the systems. Researchers use systems thinking as a control element to recognize problems in small businesses (Moore et al., 2018).

Alternative Theories

My exploration of alternative theories confirmed the relevance of the chosen theory for this study. There are many sustainability theories that have emerged in the research literature. In the following subsections, I offer descriptions of the theories that I did not use and the reasons why these theories were not chosen.

Chaos theory. Chaos theory, as explained by Thamizhchelvy and Geetha (2015), is a sufficient theory but was not used because the environment must be preplanned to yield a known outcome. In addition, Chaos theory is a mathematically-oriented theory that researchers use to identify patterns and systems in seemingly disorganized contexts. Chaos theory differs from systems theory in that chaos theory helps to analyze the behaviors of complex interactions and doubt regarding complex systems. In the internal and external environment, recognizing chaos permittes small business owners to develop sound decisions which can add to the success of the organization. Hashamdar (2012) described chaos theory as an intricate system to clarify how circumstances can produce chaotic conduct that is impulsive. Lorenz (1963), one of the founding fathers of chaos theory, used the butterfly effect to demonstrate the phenomenon. The butterfly effect is a phenomenon that generates small changes in the input but distributes dramatic consequences in the output (Yas, Ali Termizi, Talif, & Kaur, 2017). Although the chaos theory does not have measures of control, the theory helps researchers understand how complex systems work and what causes ambiguity regarding the behavior of the dynamic systems.

Complexity theory. Complexity theory was first developed by Hartmanis and Stearns (1965). Hartmanis and Stearns argued that the connections which involved system components were created by the growth of patterns and associations. Axelrod (1999) noted that complexity theory focuses on many different adaptive systems. This theory is comparable to chaos theory but does not shed light on the rationality of the complex systems. Han and McKelvey (2016) offered information on how to incorporate complexity theory into small businesses to promote growth while identifying methods for how small businesses can be more effective and less friable. The identifying methods Han and McKelvey used to demonstrate small business effectiveness included building effective networks, building responsible accountability, and building trust. Building effective networks of supporters helps to promote legality and influence resources that are available along with vast knowledge and invaluable information. Having the capability of calling on the network increases effectiveness and promotes a healthy reputation (Han & McKelvey, 2016). Building responsible accountability includes developing clear and solid financial reports, which illustrate how small businesses allocate funds and spend resources. How funds are spent shows the capability of small business owners and managers, and showing financial stability promotes trust, which can also promote the growth of businesses in various avenues (Han & McKelvey, 2016). Building trust in small businesses is imperative for survival. Transparency is a key factor in building trust between organizations and stakeholders, and it is an indicator of organizations to target constituents as well as the community (Han & McKelvey, 2016). Unlike the chaos theory, the complexity theory helps researchers understand why systems are unpredictable and also how these systems are contained by rules that are established in advance.

Sustainability Strategies

Small and medium-size enterprises are essential to sustainable development (Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, & Hed Vall, 2017). According to Ogbari, Ibidunni, Ogunnaike, Olokundun, and Amaihian (2018), strategic alignments are mandatory for small business survival and sustainability, and small businesses use simple innovations to contribute to the business' sustainability (Motilewa, Ogbari, & Aka, 2015). Sustainability strategies, in this study included (a) professional training and development, (b) knowledge management, (c) ecological sustainability, (d) innovation, and (e) government regulations.

Professional training and development. Training and development are used in many businesses around the world. With proper training, employees can accomplish set goals on the job. Rusaw and Fisher (2017) stated that professional training and development is an important component of an employee's career growth, organization health, and skill achievements that are connected to job performances. In an exploratory study of classroom teachers, Cox (2016) explored how to use strategies to improve training and development, which involves components such as the amount of time it takes to recruit, train, and retain. Cox showed that teachers need to use the right skill set in the organizations for which they work. Cox found that 90% of jobs competencies are learned on the job, and the other 10% are grouped into two categories: behavioral skills that are best used in the classroom setting, and skills that are hard to learn while on the job. Cox presented the learner-guided approach model, which consist of three components: (a) learning strategies that are self-guided, (b) utilization of technology, (c) financial stability, and (d) guided learning that is derived from training guides. The four components of the learner-guided approach are used by employees to increase job performances and improve retention. Overall, small business owners and managers can design and implement professional training and development competencies needed for their employees and include self-management skills that can help with employee retention and career growth (Freeman et al., 2018).

Knowledge management. Chatzoudes, Chatzoglou, and Vraimaki (2015) introduced a four-step approach in their research. The four-step approach consists of (a) knowledge antecedents, (b) knowledge process (KM), (c) satisfaction from the KM process, and (d) individual employee outcomes. An exploration of antecedents of the knowledge management offers awareness and a plethora of information to experts and individuals in academic fields, which can enhance their perception of their disciplines (Chatzoudes et al., 2015). The KM process is separated into two parts: the knowledge learning phase, and the knowledge development phase. The knowledge learning phase connects the experiences of individuals with the mental models, while the knowledge development phase has knowledge that is implicit and challenging to communicate or share (Chatzoudes et al., 2015). Satisfaction from the KM process is demonstrated by combining employees' personal experiences and increased knowledge with other employees' knowledge, in which the combination has a progressive influence on the satisfaction of employees (Chatzoudes et al., 2015). Individual employee outcomes reflect the level of commitment of employees as well as job satisfaction. According to Chaudhary and Chaudhari (2015), job satisfaction is when employees come in contact with other individual and resources while working on a job and experience positive or negative feelings from those experiences. Job attitudes such as turnover rates and job satisfaction affect the commitment of employees on the job (Mardiana, 2018).

Financial stability. Small businesses are the center of the United States economy. The owners of these small businesses invest a significant amount of capital to cultivate their business. Financial stability is a major sustainability strategy that focuses on the context of external factors, both economic and non-economic. Kremen and Ohol (2017) described financial stability as small businesses existing in a stable state which involves a timely restructuring of the resources that are used financially. Exploring and assessing the capacity of the financial segment of small businesses guarantees financial development while under environmental shock (Kremen & Ohol, 2017). This strategy generally nests the financial sustainability of small businesses within other spheres of sustainability. For example, financial sustainability may form a central sphere that is surrounded by a macroeconomic sphere (in which market and macroeconomic conditions are considered) which itself is contained in a larger ecological sphere. Another point of interest is how businesses build their business models to be adaptive to changing external factors, as well as how businesses can focus on long-term financial stability, even at the cost of short-term financial gains. In contrast, incorporating sustainability practices in a business environment requires the development of an understanding of sustainability practices as parts of a greater sustainability strategy (Rezaee & Homayoun, 2015). After all, many sustainability practices are achievable in ways that would be inimical to the achievement of the end goals that apply to the sustainability strategy (Rezaee & Homayoun, 2015). The primary reason is due to flexibility in the practical application of sustainability practices and the adaptation of such practices to a given sustainability strategy. For example, owners and managers who do not understand a specific sustainability strategy aimed at minimizing the long-term use of specific supply types and who are instructed to implement specific sustainability practices may do so in a way that achieves sustainability goals such as efficiency and achieving long-term contracts and have nothing to do with minimizing the use of certain supplies. The demands for sustainability practices have significantly increased across the United States and other countries, and the challenges that small businesses are faced with is hard to solve without proper governance (Dalwon & Sihyun, 2017). The concepts of the business models were discovered in the 1990s for researchers, and the literature has acknowledged internal factors such as financial resources, competences of small businesses, and abilities of the mind that compete with the model innovation (Panta, 2017). Nonetheless, the literature on business model archetypes is very often concentrated on making incremental gains in efficiency, productivity, or some other value to a company. Some researchers, in contrast, aim at the development of business model archetypes that are long-term in focus or sustainable (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014).

Ecological sustainability. For business purposes, ecological sustainability involves maintaining the environments required for operations, as well as projecting an environmentally friendly, or ‘green’, brand (Gast, Gundolf, & Cesinger, 2017). Ecological sustainability covers a wide spectrum of issues businesses face concerning the environments that they and their consumers are operating. Ecological disasters, such as major earthquakes, tsunamis, and the sort can leave physical environments unable to sustain social systems for long periods of time (Gast et al., 2017). For businesses, ecological sustainability is a matter of protecting these environments. There are many levels or scales of ecological sustainability. On the broadest scale, phenomena such as global warming or climate change threaten the viability of the entire world, at least in the long-term (Gast et al., 2017). On a regional scale, major natural disasters and humanmade attacks, such as from nuclear weapons, serve as the major threats to the Northeast region of Asia. The damage inflicted from these sorts of events can leave entire regions and many countries in extremely poor conditions, severely disrupting social systems and making business operations untenable for most businesses in these regions. In contrast, Kuch (2017) stated that there is a connection between proximity and ecological sustainability and that proximity cannot stand alone as it relates to sustainability goals. Kuch argued that proximity could create environments that carry both positive and negative effects on sustainability. The goal for sustainability is to irradiate values and ideas that will help provide a comprehensive picture of our world and the world we plan for to increase the viability of small businesses (Hale, Shelton, Richter, & Archambault, 2017)

Innovation. Pedersen, Gwozdz, and Hvass (2016) explored the interrelations between corporate sustainability, business model innovation, and organizational values. The researchers found that sustainability was intimately linked to both innovation and organizational values. In particular, organizational values are an important factor in the development of sustainable strategies and the establishment of innovative techniques. While it may be difficult to capture or describe organizational values quantitively, such research suggests that there are significant associations between the maintenance of the right sort of organizational values and sustainably. Organizational culture is often considered a major facet of change made to increase sustainability in small businesses, however ethical organizational cultures (organizational commitment and job satisfaction) have been studied by researchers but have not determined whether the standards are connected within small businesses (Huhtala, Tolvanen, Mauno, & Feldt, 2015). Many models are focused on maximizing sustainability by increasing the adaptability and responsiveness of such models to changing environmental conditions. Carayannis, Sindakis, and Walter (2015) explored how businesses used business model innovations to drastically increase the adaptability and responsiveness of businesses to such changing conditions. They found that the innovation of business models was often aimed at providing the structures that increased the flexibility and agility of the business processes. For example, innovative business models in the technology industry are often created for rapid decision-making and the constant collection of data. It allows managers and researchers in the company to quickly make changes in response to changing customer preferences, technological innovations, and market trends.

Government regulations. Another major component of sustainability and one that is often overlooked is the ability to anticipate and respond to changes in government regulations (Lang & Murphy, 2014). Large businesses tend to have greater capabilities in adhering to government regulations and rules than small businesses. Even so, businesses of any size should be aware of government regulations in their industries and not risk future financial and operational penalties which may threaten the sustainability of such businesses (Eriksson & Svensson, 2016). For decision-makers and stakeholders in businesses of all sizes, to avoid an economic crisis, organizations must meet the standards that are set, which allows the organizations to remain financially sustainable (Hajilou, Mirehei, Amirian, & Pilehvar, 2018). Slawinski and Bansal (2015) found that sustainability for businesses of virtually any size requires an understanding of short-term sacrifices for the establishment and securement of conditions, features, and characteristics that are conducive to long-term financial success.

Components That Affect Small Business Success

Bloch and Bhattacharya (2016) stated that small businesses experience higher failure rates compared to larger businesses even though they are stereotyped as the driving force of the economy. Contrary to popular belief, the investment of businesses does not play a vast role in seeing whether the performance of businesses generated positive or negative results (Khalique, Bontis, Shaari, & Md. Isa, 2015). Radzi, Nor, and Ali (2017) defined success, for this discussion, as a company's achievement of goals and objectives. The success of a business is measurable by the longevity of the business; however, the success and growth can be challenging to detect and measure (Sandada & Mangwandi, 2015). Khalique et al. (2015) also explained in their research on Pakistan that the training and development are underrepresented, which can lead to results that are not consistent. In any business, it is critical that small business owners or managers identify what it takes to have success in their business.

Retention. In the business world, there are factors that can affect businesses employee retention rate. According to Anasari and Bijalwan (2017), failing to retain experienced employees can cause small businesses to fail, and these businesses take heavy losses trying to train employees as well as develop their skills to support the business. Ansari and Bijalwan found that the longevity of the employees influenced their decision to stay in the business which influences team efficiency and effectiveness. The behavior displayed is called employee retention. Employees can have psychosocial problems that can negatively affect employee performance and level of commitment. As employees face challenges, they experience stress, anxiety, depression, and possibly low self-esteem, which can cause employee retention to plummet quickly (Choi, Lee, & Park, 2015).

Carnahan, Kryscynski, and Olson (2017) presented a study from an American legal service industry that was conducted in the United States that focused on attorneys who worked with corporate law firms. The authors sought to find out what factors played a role in employee retention such as human resource practices, employee satisfaction, and the level of commitment in handling employee retention. Out of the 200 law firms that were selected to participate in this study, the researchers concluded that corporate social responsibility actions were associated with high turnover rates regarding law firms that competed, but employee turnover could be lowered by improving human capital and business commitment (Carnahan et al., 2017). Cross (2015) argued that, while leveraging talent and intellect in small businesses is challenging, certain strategies help ensure that talent and intellect are being translated into growth and sustainability. Maintaining well-qualified and well-educated employees remain an important part of business growth (Cross, 2015).

Nonetheless, small businesses tend to have a problem with leveraging their talent and employee intellect. Specifically, employees and managers in small businesses are required to take on several different roles, responsibilities, and tasks. The diversity in the workload faced by small business employees and managers makes specialization quite a bit more difficult. For many employees and managers in small businesses, implementing and making fruitful use of talent and intellect, whether specialized or myriad, can be quite difficult.

Supply chain management. Supply chains are very active in a society that is global with constraints that are forever changing, which raises uncertainty commonly known as the bullwhip effect (Vokhmyanina, Zhuravskaya, & Osmolski, 2018). The bullwhip effect is caused by instabilities in demands in the supply chain and the more prominent the demands, the more competent the supply chain is (Vokhmyanina et al., 2018). Supply chain management, of course, becomes more complicated and complex the larger a company gets. Improper supply chain management can lead to major cash flow problems and competitive advantages that are lost to inadequate supply and faulty goods. It is especially the case for small businesses, which tend not to be able to afford major short-term losses in revenue. While no large business is content with major short-term losses in revenue, large businesses tend to be in a better position to handle such losses and move on; many small businesses fail because of poor supply chain management. Necessarily, then, sustainability models should incorporate considerations of supply chain management.

While efficiency has long been a staple of sustainable business practices, one of the major challenges that are connected to supply chain management is the difficulty that owners and managers have in creating a tactical cooperation plan. According to Hudnurkar, Jakhar, and Rathod (2014), one of the critical factors affecting supply chain collaboration is information technology. Certain requirements must meet the standards regarding supply chain management. The supply chain is monitored and controlled in all phases to guarantee accuracy when managers are making decisions in complexed environments (Mekki, Tounsi, & Ben Said, 2016). Likewise, increasing the efficiency in operations minimizes the number of materials used to produce goods and maximizes the amount of work being completed by a fixed, or even reduced, number of employees. After all, the efficient use of fuel is a major effort in the reduction of ecologically deleterious waste. The old fuels such as natural gas, petroleum coke, and coal were used in kilns and companies decided the range to which fuels substituted by waste materials such as unused oils, old tires, and plastics (Chatziaras, Psomopoulos, & Themelis, 2016). Substituting harmful fuels for good fuels is vital because the gas emissions from the greenhouse are reduced, thus providing ecological and economic sustainability. Many argue that waste reduction is a key component of contemporary sustainability efforts, whereas increased amounts of waste outcomes due to the growth of the population and urbanization causes concern for many countries (Shams, Sahu, Rahman, & Ahsan, 2017).

Communication. Chen and Agrawal (2017) defined communication as a dialog between two people that provide each other with resources or exchange resources. Open communication is effective between owners and managers in small businesses. The way individuals transmit information can interfere with the desired results (Andrade Vasconcelos et al., 2017). The ability to communicate effectively is a key factor in leadership among small businesses, and this factor can promote desired results within the working environment. Also, effective communication can assist owners and managers in identifying problems and conflicts and helps in making clear-cut decisions for the betterment of the team and business (Andrade Vasconcelos et al., 2017). A communication channel defined by Sanina, Balashov, Rubtcova, and Satinsky (2017) included body language, sign language, and codes in which the channels can group or used separately. Sanina et al. offered evidence on the characteristics of the communication channels from a research study on Russia (2017). The characteristics are (a) personal contact, (b) the smaller the number of steps in the communication realm, the quicker the response time, (c) facilitated contacts is the most influential in Russia than other countries, and (d) the right mixture of various communication channels is needed by organizations to deliver the best results.

Principles of Sustainability by Business Size

Howard (2015) made a case for many of the same sustainability principles and strategies applied regardless of the size of the business. While variance in business size certainly changes how sustainability strategies and practices are implemented, Howard argued that even though businesses may vary in how they implement such strategies and practices, they can do so regardless of their sizes. Other scholars (Beckmann, Hielscher, & Pies, 2014; Veleva, Todorova, Lowitt, Angus, & Neely, 2015) agreed with Howard’s assessment, given the diversity in sustainability principles and strategies, but the basic thrust of Howard’s argument is that small businesses can effectively aim at sustainability through the implementation of firm principles and strategies. Nguyen, Newby, and Macaulay (2015) revealed that a major hurdle for small businesses in competing with larger businesses, even medium-sized businesses, is being technologically adaptive. Most notably, small businesses are generally unable to benefit from economies of scale about technological capabilities and the ability to adapt to changes. Part of the problem for small businesses is that larger businesses can expand technological capabilities efficiently, establishing large, highly efficient systems. Another issue with small business capabilities is that small businesses often have to upgrade entire technological systems to keep up with technological trends, while larger businesses can incrementally upgrade their large systems much more easily. More recently, small business adaptability and technological agility have increased substantially (Nguyen et al., 2015). While the gap between small and large businesses about technological efficiency and technological economies of scale given the increasing technological opportunities for small businesses, this gap remains a substantial barrier for small businesses being competitive and sustainable, especially in markets with large competitors.

Gomes, Kneipp, Kruglianskas, daRosa, and Bichueti (2015) analyzed how business size affects sustainability management practices. The researchers discovered some distinctions in sustainability practices between small businesses and large businesses. The scholars’ case study research focus is on the following ten sustainability management principles. Gomes et al. case study research and evaluations are on ten sustainability management principles and how they apply within small businesses.

Gomes et al. stated from the research of the study that the management practices of sustainability for small businesses are related to employees from legal aspects.

The first principle evaluated by Gomes (2015) is implementing and maintaining proper business practices and upright corporate governance practices (Gomes et al., 2015). The researchers found wide variance between small and large businesses. Many large businesses operate in multiple states, sell across international borders, and are involved in multiple industries. In addition, large businesses tend to have the resources sufficient to research regulations extensively, plan their operations with these regulations in mind, and respond to changes in regulations. In contrast, even though small businesses tend not to have nearly as many regulatory challenges, they often are less able to meet regulatory requirements, which often require legal consultation to understand and implement fully. Meeting both regulatory and ethical obligations are components of maintaining sustainability for small and large businesses.

The second principle identified is incorporating sustainable growth into the decision-making process (Gomes et al., 2015). The integration of sustainable development processes in decision-making involves taking a long-term approach to business operations, even forfeiting short-term financial gains for long-term sustainability. However, small businesses can find it challenging to sacrifice short-term revenue generation for long-term profitability. Sustainability for small businesses may not allow for a long-term approach to operations when short-term threats to financial stability remain. Thus, the integration of sustainable development decision-making processes in small businesses is often much different and much more short-term focused than in large businesses.

The third principle discussed by Gomes et al. (2015) is defending human rights and respecting the culture, customs, and values of business owners, employees and investors (Gomes et al., 2015). Abandoning established organizational values and violating local, cultural, and employee values can create long-term problems in any business. Businesses that fail to recognize and appropriately account for cultural values in their base of operations risk damaging their brand among certain populations and alienating certain employees. Small businesses, despite their decreased capabilities, can be respectful of human rights, respect, cultural norms, and so forth. Nonetheless, a single slip from a small business in the mistreatment of an employee or customer (especially when a local cultural or social norm shows violation) can be detrimental for small businesses.

The fourth principle is implementing strategies as it relates to risk management on the bases of valid data and sound science (Gomes et al., 2015). Risk management is undoubtedly an increasingly important component of business growth and sustainability. Businesses must take on certain risks to grow, especially through innovation and market expansion. Small businesses may not only face the greatest risk but also have the most difficulties in obtaining and assessing valid data on risk. For small businesses, however, the entire entrepreneurial venture is itself, the high-risk high-reward project. Even in cases in which small businesses make calculated risks based on collected data, such businesses are often heavily reliant on a certain market, competition, and industry factors.

Small businesses may not have the capability to migrate risk by way of diversifying the sources of risk.

The fifth principle discussed by Gomes (2015) is seeking the continuous improvement of operations in the health and safety areas (Gomes et al., 2015). This principle also focuses on health and safety training for employees and suggest that employees of contractors receive the same training. Continuous improvement of operations through addressing health and safety concerns differs in implementation depending on the size of the business, but follows many of the same steps in a business of any size. Small businesses can perform basic assessments that can identify sources for potential safety and health incidents. This principle is more applicable to some industries than others, but is certainly accessible to any small business.

The sixth principle is seeking the continuous improvement of our operation in the environmental area (Gomes et al., 2015). This principle concerns the capabilities of an organization to implement environment-friendly operational processes. Many times, the implementation of this principle means the reduction of revenue generation. For example, a business may reduce greenhouse emissions by switching to hybrid delivery vehicles. For small businesses, making substantial changes to operations to have positive impacts on the environment can be simple, even if the overall impacts pale in comparison to those made by large businesses.

The seventh principle is contributing to the management of biodiversity and the approaches integrated into the planning of land use (Gomes et al., 2015). Small businesses operate within a fixed, relatively small amount of land, while large businesses tend to operate across multiple areas or on a large plot of land. Gomes et al. (2015) noted that this principle is a major point of distinction between large and small businesses. Businesses of any size can actively participate in local and regional efforts to conserve biodiversity.

The eighth principle is facilitating and encouraging improvement in environmental areas (Gomes et al., 2015). Most urban areas have recycling collection services that make it easy for businesses to recycle. Similarly, policies that encourage the disposal of waste products are as applicable to small businesses as large businesses. On the issue of using recyclable and eco-friendly materials in the production of goods, large businesses and small businesses carry the burden of paying more for many such materials. The one advantage that large businesses have in using recyclable materials is that they may be in a better financial position to afford to use recyclable materials. However, this explanation undercuts the notion that large businesses will cut costs and retain the quality of products when possible. Nonetheless, small businesses can spend more on expensive recyclable materials to reinforce an environmentally friendly brand image.

The ninth principle is contributing to the social, economic and institutional development of the surrounding countries and communities (Gomes et al., 2015). It is another principle that is applicable across businesses of any size. Small businesses can work with local communities to serve and assist with the effects of social impacts. Partnering with local businesses is a great way for small businesses to establish a brand image in a community while developing important business relationships. Likewise, economic development is often inherently a part of the development of a small business, as small businesses can offer employment to locals.

The tenth principle is implementing clear agreements with stakeholders for verification of information (Gomes et al., 2015). This principle is focused on financial sustainability and maintaining effective operations in the long-term. Even though the number of stakeholders in a large business tends to be much greater than the number in a small business, the application of this principle will be very similar across businesses of all sizes. Businesses have different methods of implementing this principle, but size will not impact how this principle is applied. To implement the principle, small businesses would need to ensure that the communication systems are effective, and representatives demonstrate honesty with clients and distributors. The approach is the same in larger businesses with few exceptions. The high applicability of this principle suggests that small businesses can focus on this principle to help ensure financial sustainability.

The 10 principles and their applications across businesses of different sizes demonstrate that some of the most common sustainability principles are not particularly applicable to small businesses. A major theme that emerged in the exploration of these principles could be applicable across businesses of varying sizes is that large businesses have greater abilities to make short-term financial sacrifices for the prospects of long-term financial gain, either through early technological upgrades, developing a positive brand image across many populations and markets, or taking major risks. To execute these principles, business owners should be literate in the financial world. Financial literacy, according to Henager and Cude (2016), is the financial knowledge that is objective along with the financial knowledge that is subjective knowledgeability. Nonetheless, while small businesses have distinct disadvantages in implementing many of these principles in practice, there are still plenty of sustainability principles that businesses can implement to help ensure long-term success and growth (Gomes et al., 2015).

Features of Small Business Owners

Management and leadership. Management and leadership skills are driving forces that can aid in the success or failure of small businesses. Wells (2018) stated that there is a difference between managers and leaders. Managers are responsible for making sure that everything runs smoothly, makes sure the rules are followed and makes sure that assigned jobs are carried out while leaders are vision seekers who can carry out the vision with their team (Wells, 2018). A manager's leadership style along with the decisions made affects the performance of businesses, and the success rate depends heavily on the response of their follower's reaction (Javad et al., 2017). Therefore, an inclusive understanding of how employees view leadership and how the performance may influence their workplace is desired.

Calopa (2017) discussed four aspects of management which are planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The first process of management starts with planning and includes the business owner's strategic business goals and techniques that are enforceable to achieve the desired results. The second process of management is organizing in which business owners finalize the structure of the organization, select related activities, and delegate responsibilities. The third process of management is business owners leading their managers by motivating and choosing various communication styles to communicate with others. The fourth process of management is controlling in which owners investigate policies and procedures and take action to correct when needed (Calopa, 2017).

Experience. Dittmar and Duchin (2016) provided information on the development of managerial styles and how their experiences have an impact on the decisions that they make. The four measures that are used in the researcher's study are measures of distress, measures of adverse shocks to a business bond rating, measures of adverse shocks for cash flow, and adverse measures of stock returns. Over 9,000 managers were tracked for the study with a primary focus on their professional experiences. The evidence proves that managers with experience at businesses that are troubled had a decrease debt-to-assets by 0.9-1.5 percent and an increase in cash-to-asset by 2.0-2.8 percent once they became managers (Dittmar & Duchin, 2016). The evidence above shows how important a manager's experience is to small businesses.

Scientific and Community Development Models

Small businesses can benefit from developing a business model which is a tool that organizations can use to govern their business (Mardian, Astuti, & Rahardjo, 2018). Carayannis et al., (2015) explored the importance of business model innovation in efforts to increase organizational sustainability. Scientific models of sustainability tend to focus heavily on the ecological aspects of sustainability, including observations and predictions about current ecological trends on various geographical levels. Another type of sustainability model is the community development model, which focuses on how communities develop in such a way that promotes sustainability across most aspects of sustainability. Both the scientific and community development models do not have business-orientation. Certainly, community development models have some business focus, as businesses are a part of maintaining most communities. But the focus of such models tends to be on long-term ecological issues and ensuring the community itself can maintain without major disruptions. Despite neither of these models focusing on the financial sustainability of businesses, they are applied by businesses and researching developing business models for the discovery of strategies and approaches to business development. For example, scientific models of sustainability are important for understanding the ecological factors that may affect businesses, while community development models can be important for businesses attempting to locate communities that are favorable for business operations

Some sustainable business models are grounded on the establishment of organizational rules, processes, and structures that will be resistant to changing environmental and market conditions, remaining heavily efficient and competitive with shifting customer preferences (Dentchev et al., 2016). These types of business models assume that considerable changes will occur in the operational environment of the business, including the preferences of customers. Being adaptive and responsive to changing conditions are the concentrations of sustainability. Tools such as production management, marketing, and supply chain management are tools that can be useful in manager’s decisions regarding the environment and social facets of the organizations (Johnson, 2015; Whitehead, 2017). While the concept of sustainability is a relatively simple one, there are different ways to conceptualize and approach sustainability in business practice. An important concept of sustainability is focusing on long-term viability. Many business models and approaches to business are focused on short-term profits and revenue generation.

Pillars of Financial Stability

Another concept of the long-term focus of sustainability is responsiveness or agility. Business agility refers to the ability of a business to respond to changing external and environmental factors (Mardian et al., 2018). Businesses that lack agility are not open to change. Instead of adapting to changes through external factors, some businesses try to resist them and continue pushing antiquated offerings or marketing techniques. For example, the proliferation of the internet left many businesses relying on antiquated services. These businesses are slow in taking advantage of digitally-based services such as marketing. However, businesses that viewed the internet revolution as providing numerous opportunities for growth were able to expand. Businesses that are highly agile can recognize and predict external factors and how they will change over time. The owners and managers of such businesses tend to form strategies that are highly aware of ecological, social, macroeconomic, and market factors.

According to León (2010), there are four pillars of financial stability for any business. The first is strategic planning, which involves decision-making patterns that are intended to take advantage of favorable external factors through customer segmentation, targeted marketing, and value propositions that are responsive to consumer demand and business environments. Strategic planning tends to include long-term visions for markets and industries and, thus, is very suited to sustainability efforts. A major part of strategic planning is attempting to identify potential ways that business may need to adapt to changing environmental factors. There is a host of approaches to strategic planning, business model construction, and related concepts in the research literature.

The second pillar of financial stability is revenue diversification**.** In revenue diversification, small businesses should not become too dependent on any single source of revenue; but, should expand the sources of revenue generation to include a diversity of sources (Dosi, Grazzi, & Moschella, 2017). For example, a bakery business in any local area may rely heavily on the design and production of wedding cakes and wedding confections. This source of revenue is not only seasonal, peaking during the spring and summer months, but also dependent on low competition. If a competitor emerges in the market that specializes in wedding cake design and other wedding-related services, the bakery may lose a significant portion of its market share and may even have to drop prices to remain competitive in this industry. But by expanded services to focus on confections for graduation, other sorts of parties and celebrations, and various other niche bakery services, it will become much less reliant on the wedding market for its revenue. Such diversification of sources of revenue generation can make the bakery much more sustainable in the long-term, increasing its resilience to changes in the market and maximizing its agility.

The third pillar is sound administration and accounting practices. Regardless of how sound business strategies are for any company, poor administration and accounting practices can damage the financial stability of a company (Schaltegger, Hansen, &

Lüdeke-Freund, 2016). Understanding cash flow, interest paid on loans, and the proper tax procedures are crucial even for small businesses to remain financially stable. Given the popularity of business model innovation and business strategy development, administrative and accounting practices are ignored by businesses, especially small businesses, but they remain, nonetheless, a very important part of financial sustainability.

The fourth pillar is revenue generation. Quite simply, businesses need a reliable income to survive. The importance of revenue generation in nations that are emerging is to guarantee constant guidance to the development of countries by sponsoring small businesses (Saeed, Liu, Hussain, & Zulfiqar, 2017). Revenue generation source diversification is an excellent part of a long-term strategy aimed at financial sustainability, but without strong or at least moderate cash flows, a business cannot be financially sustainable. Confirming income generation relies heavily on the factors above, of course. This back-to-the-basics approach to financial sustainability is an important one and a reminder that what truly matters in financial sustainability is revenue generation. Revenue enables marketing efforts, the employment of strategies, and funding operations, including paying employees.

One of the most important factors in getting businesses to take collective action against a particular ecological problem is culture. After all, the establishment of a pro-ecological sustainability culture can prompt action from most businesses. Also, culture can extend beyond affecting businesses and their personnel and into consumer groups. The clearest example of this in today's business world is the idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Small businesses articulate the strategies used for CSR but need to understand which challenges to support, how much time to contribute and what resources will be used such as cash or products (Hilebrand, Demotta, Sen, and Valenzuela, 2017). CSR extends beyond ecological considerations and forms of charity and volunteerism. Nonetheless, a central tenet of CSR is ecological responsibility. Under CSR, businesses should not only minimize their contributions to ecological problems but should also play active roles in combating ecological problems that have already emerged (Spence, 2016). Corporate social responsibility helps solve the tragedy of the commons effectively by creating a set of incentives and punishments for compliance and noncompliance, respectively. Businesses that aim at incorporating CSR initiatives in their operations can market such initiatives and gain consumer attention (and demand) for their products and services. In contrast, businesses that ignore CSR initiatives and their roles in ecological problems can face pushback from particular consumer segments.

Macroeconomic and geological sustainability. Da Cunha and Bittes (2018) explained that macroeconomic sustainability refers to the ability of businesses to survive economic factors from developing economies. For large businesses, the entire economy of a country or even the global economy serves as the source of most of the important economic factors. But for small businesses, the local economy is what it is important, based on the geographical location that the business operates in or serves in. The major exception to this is the small online business, which may serve a much larger

geographical location, but is still dependent on certain economic factors related to the specific industry that the online business operates in (Demil & Lecocq, 2010).

The Concept of Sustainability

In business contexts, sustainability refers to the ability of a business to survive in the long-term (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). While this definition of sustainability is extremely simple, there are some sustainability factors, which is covered in detail in this literature review. The concept of sustainability divides several ways. Most prominently, sustainability factors divide into internal and external factors. The internal and external factors must be considered to discover what promotes sustainability, even as it relates to reporting and documentation (Nazari, Herremans, & Warsame, 2015).

Nonetheless, the relationship between internal and external factors is an intimate one. After all, internal factors are strongly affected by external factors. For example, businesses in the fitness tracker bands industry depend on various external factors when deciding which strategies to employ. If a competitor creates a superior technology, the focal strategy may involve matching or surpassing this technology. In a more general sense, the business will also be aware of consumer trends and market outlooks when deciding on strategies. Thus, the internal and external components of sustainability make disassociation impossible. Moreover, the different factors of sustainability can fall under different categorizations and typologies. While the concept of sustainability is a relatively simple one, there are different ways to conceptualize and approach sustainability in business practice.

Small businesses must rely heavily on the individual inventiveness of managers, particularly owners (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2014). Large businesses can often have managers with particularly low personal initiative and even poor leadership skills. Such businesses can overcome these managerial issues in the long-term through initiatives, other sources of strong management, and so forth. Often, the success of small businesses relies on the efficacy and reliability of management. Many small businesses fail because they lack the appropriate management. The issue of management in small business is, of course, a complex one. There are a plethora of reasons why some small business managers fail, and others succeed, leading to the subsequent failure or success of their businesses. While age is not a factor for managerial success in small businesses, the experience and focuses on opportunities of managers can have substantial positive influences on small business growth (Gielnik, Zacher, & Schmitt, 2017).

A major barrier for small, and especially embryonic, businesses is financing. Small businesses tend to have difficulties in financing expansion projects (Banez-Chicharro, Olmos, Ramos, & Latorre, 2017). While this may inhibit growth, it can help to stabilize a small business, disallowing too-rapid expansion and outgrowing the market. Similarly, nascent businesses tend to benefit massively from small business innovation research programs, innovation strategies, and continued growth that utilizes new technology resources to foster productivity (Chan & Fung, 2016). Such programs offer small businesses a host of opportunities, including financial and networking opportunities. One advantage of small businesses is that they can innovate extremely quickly, being both experimental and responsive to other innovations in the market and consumer trends and preferences (Linton & Solomon, 2017).

Maintaining well-qualified and well-educated employees remain an important part of business growth (Cross, 2015). Nonetheless, small businesses tend to have a problem with leveraging their talent and employee intellect. Specifically, employees and managers comparable in small businesses are required to take on several different roles, responsibilities, and tasks. The diversity in the workload faced by small business employees and managers makes specialization quite a bit more difficult. For many employees and managers in small businesses, implementing and making fruitful use of talent and intellect, whether specialized or myriad, can be quite difficult. Cross (2015) argued that, while leveraging talent and intellect in small businesses is challenging, certain strategies help ensure that talent and intellect are being translated into growth and sustainability.

Business size also has a major impact on ecological and green sustainability practices by firms (Vlachos, 2016). Small businesses are generally less able to implement meaningful ecological and green sustainability practices. Large businesses, in contrast, have the capabilities to launch major green campaigns, generally to reinforce their brands. Training is both a source of major problems that arise in small businesses and one of the differentiating factors for small business success (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). Large businesses tend to experience businesses. That is, large businesses tend to have well-established structures and managers with extensive experience. Small businesses, on the other hand, vary greatly in age. Many small businesses remain small for decades, never outgrowing their markets. Research suggests that young small firms are less able to be responsive to shifts in market trends, business cycles, seasonality, and consumer demand fluctuations (Arbussa et al., 2017). Owners and managers in small firms that face these challenges can benefit from the support of stakeholders and solid management strategies, which includes gaining knowledge regarding ecological and green sustainability practices. The ecological and green sustainability can decrease, and productivity of the business environment is jeopardized.

A model of small business growth. Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) presented a model of small business growth based on the notion that, despite the complexity of factors for small business success, certain mediating factors have major impacts across many and even most small businesses. The researchers established several different sets of factors for small business growth. The first set is entrepreneurial factors. These factors involve the efforts of managers and owners to maximize small business growth and innovation. Such entrepreneurial factors include strategy creation, development, and deployment. In small businesses with high levels of entrepreneurial activity from either owners or managers, business is expected to grow. Thus, a lack of entrepreneurial drive or effort can substantially decrease small business growth. For small business owners and managers, being entrepreneurial is crucial for early development. The formation of strategies and the implementation of such strategies are important for identifying prospective markets, reaching target customers, and providing value to such customers. So many small businesses fail early on because they are unable to execute strategies. The researchers began their small business growth model with entrepreneurial factors because they play such an important role in the success of small businesses.

The second set of factors identified by Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) involved various human capital factors. While large businesses rely on a greater number of employees, each employee of a small business can play a major role in the success of the business. Therefore, in many ways, small businesses are much more reliant on individual employees for continued success. Having even one employee who performs poorly can have major consequences for small businesses. Similarly, a single stellar employee can give small businesses a major competitive advantage in a local market. Human capital is, of course, important for businesses of all sizes, but the role that human capital plays in small businesses is distinct from the role it plays in large businesses. Small businesses much manage employees tightly. After all, if even one or two employees in a small business exit suddenly from the businesses, operations may be in jeopardy. Thus, it is important for small businesses to remain active in their efforts to minimize employee turnover and to help ensure that human capital factors are addressed sufficiently. The researchers argue that small business owners and managers must ensure that human capital disruptions do not occur. Of course, there are dozens of sources for human capital disruptions, from insufficient pay in certain markets to the mistreatment of employees. As a result of the high diversity in the types of human capital factors, such factors tend to encompass a broad range of operational issues.

The third set identified by Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) included financial capital factors. As discussed earlier, small businesses tend to be at a strict disadvantage in financing compared to larger companies. Even though small businesses tend to handle much less inventory and, of course, many fewer employees than large businesses, the former still have to finance inventory and payrolls. Large companies are generally granted much greater credit lines given the high sales volumes that large companies tend to earn. Nonetheless, small businesses may struggle to find even sufficient financing for inventory and filling sales orders. There is little doubt that banks and other financial institutions tend to favor financing purchase orders for large businesses, given that failure is not expected for such businesses. The expected returns to such financial institutions are greater. Financial capital factors, then, concern primarily the rate of growth and expansion opportunities for large businesses, while often concern primarily funding existing or near-future orders for small businesses. Likewise, small businesses may run into short-term financial issues only solvable through increased spending and credit. For example, short-term cash flow problems can emerge when buyers are late on payments or supplies are late on delivery. Large businesses are in much better positions to overcome cash flow issues simply through increased financing. But for small businesses, this is not always an option. As a result, Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) considered financial capital factors when assessing not only the prospects for the growth of a small business but also the prospects for sustainability for a small business.

Entrepreneurial, human capital, and financial capital are three sets of factors assessed by Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) individually to determine the prospects for small business growth and sustainability. The researchers also consider innovation to be a mediating factor for these sets of factors and small business growth. Specifically, innovation also plays a major role as mediator in the small business growth model developed by Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014), with high levels of innovation helping to maximize the role of entrepreneurial, human capital, and financial capital factors in increasing business growth. Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014), however, do not consider innovation to be a major factor or set of factors independently. That is, small businesses can be highly innovative and still fail on any of the three sets of primary factors for small business growth, and the business may fail to grow or fail. Innovation, then, is more of a supporting factor for business growth and sustainability for small businesses.

Transition

Section 1 was an overview of small business sustainability, particularly survival challenges that business owners face due to the lack of training for their managers. Some organizations have a vast amount of people that have different levels of skill, experience, and knowledge. Thus, top managers with extensive management experience influence the organization's structure and promote sustainability (Junna, Bingsheng, & Ning, 2015). I conducted a multiple case study of three small retail businesses in the southeastern region of the United States to explore how owners use training programs to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years. A case study is the most appropriate method for answering the research question of *what managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years?* Gaining a better understanding of managerial strategies can influence small business owners to grow and maintain their operations.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I focuse on the managerial strategies that small business owners use to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. Sustainability standards are valuable tools for acknowledging the social and environmental encounters that owners and managers face in day-to-day operations (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2017). However, the greatest challenge that small business owners face is not aligning the sustainability techniques with the vision and business strategies of the organization (Cavaleri & Shabana, 2018). In this section, I define the methods I used to explore the strategies that small retail business owners implemented to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. The main topics in Section 2 include the role of the researcher, research method, research design, population and sampling, the participants, and ethical research practices. Section 3 includes the findings of the study, discussions of the study’s application to business practice and implication for social change, recommendations for future research, and my conclusions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore managerial training strategies that small retail business owners apply to sustain operation beyond the first 5 years. The targeted population of this study was three small retail businesses that have developed efficacious managerial training strategies and remained sustainable beyond 5 years in the southeastern region of the United States. This study’s contribution to positive social change may include beneficial implementation of training strategies, failure rate reduction, increased economic growth of small businesses, and thus reduced unemployment rates. The social impact of this study could promote sustainability of existing small businesses in the community, which can influence the success of new businesses.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher included collecting data from the research participants in an honest manner. Thorpe et al. (2018) argued that researchers would benefit from knowing participants cultural influences and norms. Researchers should also identify and avoid personal biases to keep from creating ethical issues. According to Carolan, Smith, and Forbat (2016), researchers should be clear on their approach, their position, and the ethical scopes of research. The researcher bears the responsibility of sharing her or his perspective on theoretic positions in a study (Cronin, 2014).

I did not have business relationships with the three small organizations or the research participants. I used interview protocol to guarantee that clear focus was placed only on the interview, and to separate my views from the purposes of assembling data. I used member checking to guarantee that the collected data was accurate. Data collection originated after I received Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-03-18-0428674. The IRB is established to guarantee that human subjects are protected from risk through constant review of protocols and the three ethical philosophies that are outlined in the Belmont Report (Liberale & Kovach, 2017). The purpose of the Belmont Report was to guard the rights of research participants and to serve as an ethical framework that involves three major principles used in many areas of research: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016). The Belmont Report is also a flexible document that focuses on unforeseen issues because the pace of research is constantly changing (Miracle, 2016).

The first principle, respect for persons, involves maintaining autonomy and respecting participants' rights to participate in research or not. Research participants should completely agree to participate, and the researcher should use informed consent to ensure that the participants are knowledgeable of the purpose of the study. The second principle, beneficence, involves maximizing the benefits while minimizing the risk of doing harm and decreasing opposing harm. The third principle, justice, requires that participants receive fair and equal treatment (Miracle, 2016). Policy makers, scientists, and clinicians have raised concerns for many years regarding ethical and legal issues when involving human participants, and researchers must be sure to protect participants (Camille, Nian-Lin Reena, & Ban Leong, 2016).

In this qualitative multiple case study, I collected data from owners of small retail businesses by conducting interviews. According to Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2018), individual interviews are data collection methods commonly used in qualitative studies. For interviews, I used an interview protocol. An interview protocol includes a set of interview questions that help the researcher process information throughout the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Scripts of what the researcher verbalizes before and after the interview are also a component of the interview protocol.

Interview protocols prompt the interviewer to gather informed consent, finalize a location to conduct the interview, provide detailed information regarding the interview process, provide a follow-up by member checking, and remind the interviewer of specific information to collect (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Roulston (2016) noted that researchers and interviewers should focus on how interviews are produced and the importance of researchers subjecting their participation in interviews. Following an interview protocol was important in this study because the interviewees could have become confused, which would have increased the chances of them answering only parts of the questions, which leads to a discrepancy in data (see Rosenthal, 2016).

Participants

I began data collection once I received approval from the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I used meaningful sampling to access three small retail business owners in three organizations. Data saturation in multiple case studies can be attained by interviewing a minimum of three participants (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). According to Tran, Porcher, Ravaud, and Viet-Chi (2017), determining data saturation can become a challenge because researchers can only use information that they have located, and the decision to stop data collection is based on the experience of the researcher. To meet the guidelines for participantion in the study, participants had to work for small retail businesses whose owners successfully executed managerial strategies to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. Meticulous research is the result of researchers collecting data from multiple sources (Yin, 2017), and my choice of three small retail business owners in the southeastern region of the United States was appropriate.

I connected with participants directly by contacting the businesses to introduce myself and explain the purpose of the interviews, the role of the interviewees, and the purpose of the study. I emailed an invitation letter along with the informed consent form to the chosen participants. The consent form had an option to reply with an “I consent,” which indicated that the participant wanted to participate in the study. The interview participants had to be owners of small retail businesses who had successfully executed managerial strategies to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years.

Research Method and Design

The main reason for research is to develop new information and explore problems in an efficient and demanding process (Stichler, 2016). The three research methods used in research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative researchers focus on understanding a phenomenon and experiences of research participants (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Researchers use the quantitative method to examine and test hypotheses, and this type of research is empirical in nature (He, 2018). Quantitative researchers examine numerical evidence to reach a conclusion, which was not required for my research question. Mixed methods were likewise not appropriate for this study because I did not use the quantitative method to gather relative evidence.

Research Method

I selected the qualitative method for this study. The main component of qualitative research is to look at the lived experiences of participants when studying a phenomenon. Sligo, Naim, and McGee (2018) noted that the methods of research should be steered by the research question, topic, and data. I used qualitative research because there was not enough information regarding a phenomenon and I wanted to view specific issues in a particular way (see Stichler, 2016). Quantitative researchers use numerical data to examine processes and events that both demonstrate certainty and predictable uncertainty (Duta & Duta, 2017). Mixed methods researchers link qualitative and quantitative paradigms and provide a blend so that both are interdependent but still keep their distinctive features (Sligo et al., 2018). Thus, neither quantitative nor mixed methods were suitable for this study. I chose the qualitative research method in hopes of gaining knowledge of the managerial strategies used by small retail business owners to promote sustainability beyond the first 5 years.

Research Design

Demishkevich (2015) suggested that the most commonly used qualitative designs are ethnography, narrative approaches, case studies, and phenomenology. Researchers use an ethnographic design when studying individuals or groups of people based on their culture or geographical location (Draper, 2015). The focus of this study was not on individual or group cultures; therefore, ethnography was not appropriate. Narrative researchers focus on listening and understanding participants' stories that may reflect themselves or experiences in their life in sequence (Joyce, 2015). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because a life story may not influence business decisions within a specified time and space. Phenomenological design was not suited for this study because the participants' viewpoints are explored in relation to the phenomena of study (Matua & Van, 2015).

I used a qualitative case study research design for this study because I sought to focus on managerial strategies small retail business owners used to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. A case study is an all-inclusive technique that invloves various data sources that offers detailed information regarding research phenomena in real circumstances (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). When researchers use multiple qualitative methods, there are greater opportunities for more comprehensive descriptions (Morgan et al., 2017). Data saturation is when data collection is no longer needed because there is not any new information that has been identified and only repeats are noted (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). I continued data collection until data saturation was reached.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative multiple case study consisted of three small retail businesses in the southeastern region of the United States that successfully sustained their operations beyond the first 5 years. These small businesses have less than 50 employees. According to Rosenthal (2016), an important part of the research process is determining the sample size for the interviews.

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbon (2015) defined sampling as selecting explicit data sources from data that have been previously collected to explain the objectives of the research. Palinkas (2015) noted that purposeful sampling is beneficial in qualitative research for identifying and collecting evidence correlated to the phenomenon. Also, purposeful sampling allows the researchers to assume a qualitative stance and to develop and assess a variety of assumptions (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2015).

As I have noted, representatives of three small retail businesses operating in the southeastern region of the United States participated in this study. Small retail businesses have between 1 and 499 employees according to the SBA (2015). The participants I interviewed were able to provide concrete answers related to the research questions because of past successful experiences with the phenomenon.

I held the interviews in a private space within each of the small business located in the southeastern region of the United States. This ensured that there was minimal noise for participants and for the purpose of recording. The interview protocol ensured I remained on track and stayed consistent throughout the interviews that lasted between 30-45 minutes in length. Once I received IRB approval and before conducting interviews, I made sure the candidates met the study criteria. The key reason for verifying the participants' eligibility before conducting interviews was to confirm that each participant met the qualifying standards. Researchers are responsible for determining a participant's capability, comprehension level, and overall fit for the study (Pisani et al., 2016).

Ethical Research

The participants' protection was critical in guaranteeing ethical research (Roets, 2017). I completed the training for Protecting Human Subject Research Participants by the National Institute of Health Training on Human Participants to guarantee low risk to research participants. I explained that participation was on a voluntary basis and participants could remove themselves before the interview or during the interview and participants would not be treated contrarily. I specified this information in the informed consent form. The information in the informed consent form included the researcher's information and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) contact email and phone numbers. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-03-18-0428674. The IRB, also referred to as the human research ethics committee was responsible for the protection of participants in research and guaranteed compliance with ethical research (Carr, 2015). The IRB process demanded that participants' participation be voluntary without threats or coercion of any kind (Hamilton & Stichler, 2015). The researcher bears the responsibility of assuring participants that all information provided will be kept confidential as permitted by law, except members of the research team (Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker, 2018). I protected and always kept all participants information confidential. I did not include names to guarantee the anonymity and privacy of each participant. I used generic names such as P1, P2, and P3. All password-word protected data that were collected from each participant is kept in a safe place for 5 years, then I will destroy the data by following Walden University's policy. Following this process guarantees participants' confidentiality.

Researchers must be clear about the purpose of the research and gain informed consent. Contact information (name and telephone number) and other traceable information of each participant will not show on any form (Hamilton & Stichler, 2015). Informed consent must be obtained without influence, and the document should be simple enough for the participant to understand (Sil & Das, 2017). Informed consent serves the purpose of effectuating the participants' autonomy and inspects procedures to influence trust and comprehension (Wolf, Clayton, & Lawrenz, 2018). Hamilton and Stichler (2015) noted that waiting for approval for data collection from the IRB may disrupt planned research schedules but starting data collection before approval is a serious violation. The participants did not receive payment or rewards for participating in the study, however, each participant will receive one final hard copy of the study.

Data Collection Instruments

In this qualitative multiple case study, I was the primary source for data collection. I collected data from small retail businesses operating in the southeastern region of the United States. I conducted semi-structured interviews with small business owners who have successfully implemented managerial strategies in their operations. The interview protocol was essential for case study interviews and contains the rules and procedures that guided the research process (Yin, 2017). The reliability of the qualitative case study was influenced by the interview protocol (Yin, 2017). The interview protocol framework included four phases which were (a) ensure that interview questions are parallel with research questions, (b) structuring an analysis-based conversation between the researcher and participant, (c) receive comments based on interview protocols, and (d) directing the protocol process.

I used a tape recorder during the interview to capture the answers of the participants, and I also took notes with a notepad throughout the interview process. The purpose of using a tape recorder was for accuracy of each participant's answers. Through member checking, a validation technique, participants will be able to review their interview and analyzed data which promotes trustworthiness (Birt, Walter, Scott, Cavers,

& Campbell, 2016). Based on the research paradigm, member checking allows the researcher to incorporate feedback into reports and interpretations as part of added information for the research (Madill & Sullivan, 2017). Member checking was also used to remove possible misrepresentation of interviews; and if member checking shows misrepresentation of the interview, the researcher must change his or her analyses to align with the participant's analyses (Varpio, Aijawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Thus, to guarantee accurate data and inspire trustworthiness, I used member checking.

Data Collection Technique

Interviews were the technique used for data collection for this study. The research question for this anticipated study was: What managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years? Researchers can choose from interview formats such as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews give participants the opportunity to answer questions that are open-ended with no set time frame (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Face-to-face interviews are the most common method that allows participants to ask questions and for researchers to provide clarity during the interview session (Barr et al., 2017). Face-to-face semi-structured audio-recorded interviews were the main data collection technique that I used to gather rich data. I asked each participant seven open-ended questions. Other useful instruments that I used to conduct the interview was a notepad and pen. I scheduled each participant based on their availability and contacted each participant one day before the interview to confirm date and time. I reiterated participants' rights and the procedure for the interview. The next available date, the participants shared in the interview process. Drouin, Stewart, and Van Gorder (2015) noted that triangulation, a study design used to compile multiple data sources, offers a different view of the phenomenon and is ultimately united for a comprehensive view (business reports, business plans, organization website). I asked for these items at the beginning of the interview.

Case studies do not necessarily require a pilot study as the interview questions are semi-structured, so I asked each participant if they understand, and potentially reword if needed, to avoid a pilot study. Right before the interview, I reiterated the purpose of the interview, ensured participants the right to answer some, all, or no questions without penalty, and the privacy procedures of the study. Smaller studies reach data saturation faster than a larger study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I interviewed at least three participants to ensure saturation.

One week after the interview and at the participant's convenience, I followed through with member checking to ensure accuracy and to minimize misinterpretation on any parts of the interview (Varpio et al., 2017). The information that I collected remained stored on a database that is password-protected that is only available to me, in a non-destructible safe and the information will be destroyed after 5 years. After completion of the study, I provided each participant with a hard copy of the study and its findings.

Data Organization Technique

To differentiate between each participant, I used a code system (Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3), which protects the identity of each participant. I kept the collected research data and a pencil and notepad that allowed me the opportunity to reflect on handwritten notes. Reflective journaling allows researchers to view and analyze the truths of their experiences that have been captured on paper (Rodriguez, 2017). I used a digital tape recorder to record each participants' interview, then use a password-protected database to store the data. According to Hammad (2016), files that are password-protected on devices will not be visible when performing visual examination. The information that I collected was stored on a database that is password-protected and only available to me, in a non-destructible safe, and the information will be destroyed after 5 years.

Data Analysis

The central research question was: What managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years? The systems theory guides the chosen research study discovering the viewpoints of small retail business owners in the southeastern region of the United States. Small business retail owners operate with managers and rely on the transfer of principles from one arena to another (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Business documentation, physical artifacts, and interview questions influence triangulation, which can yield solid results for research analysis and answering the central research question. Collective data sources such as open-ended interviews, business documents, and interviewer-participant observation confirm equivalent findings in the research study (Yin, 2017).

To promote research analysis, I (a) organized the data, (b) evaluated the collection of data, (c) coded the data, and (d) developed the themes from the data collected. The computer software called NVivo was used to transcribe and code data from the interview sessions during the data analysis phase. I used the NVivo computer software to seek an analysis and coded information from the data that was collected. The code words were organized and categorized based on the identifying themes. Researchers should have experience by understanding how and by whom transcription is to occur. Sharing post-interview transcriptions and the process for how data was managed provides the reader with additional details and promotes the quality of the transcription (Clark, Birkheadi, Fernandez, & Egger, 2017)

The intent was to explore successful managerial strategies that small business retail owners possess. Once the data was collected, I explained the strategies needed to sustain small retail businesses beyond the first 5 years in the southeastern region of the United States. I compared the key strategies with those of previous systems theory results. I started the data analysis process by looking at the interview records, following transcription and interpretation, to draw conclusions. My findings showed the final themes that denote the information from semi-structured interviews, which determines the consensus.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability, according to Yin (2017), is the consistency and dependability of the methodology for the case study. Member checking and triangulation will serve as tools for dependability which will allow the researcher an opportunity to capture the fluidity of observations (Birt et al., 2016). Researchers remain focused and unprejudiced during participant interviews by utilizing the interview protocol. Thus, I used the interview protocol and asked specific questions that were pertinent in answering the central research question.

In a qualitative research study, the boundaries for variability is endured with the exception that the methodology is consistent in data, but may differ in richness (Lawrence, 2015). Data saturation was the ultimate standard for qualitative research, and I honed in on the various perspectives of participants and not necessarily the number of participants (Hancock et al., 2016). I collected data from the interview questions to influence reliability by way of the interview protocol. To ensure reliability, I asked open-ended questions in the same stance for each participant to guarantee reliability.

Validity

Lawrence (2015) noted that validity is the appropriateness of the data and processes as it relates to the qualitative research study. Validity is the appropriateness of the methodology used for the collection of data analysis to achieve reliable results (Lawrence, 2015). Lawrence states that validity is the appropriateness of the data and processes used in a qualitative research study. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) stated that accurately reporting data saturation influences transparency which enhances trustworthiness. I used purposeful sampling when selecting participants so that the responses of the participants were meaningful. I visited with each participant a couple of times before starting the interview and data collection process. The process allowed the participants to become familiar with my presence. Building relationships with each participant increased trust and decreased the inclination of withholding information.

I contacted each participant by way of member checking to guarantee that I understand the participant responses. I used NVivo software to compare and analyze the themes from each research participant's data, which will influence the creditability, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. I used interviews and peer-reviewed journal articles as the sources of data to guarantee internal validity. I avoided asking misleading questions.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 includes a comprehensive discussion of the various points in conducting the research study. The points include the method and design, role of the researcher, data collection, description of participants, procedures to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research study, and analysis of data collection. After a run of interview questions, I proposed to gather new information that will enhance the knowledge sustaining small retail businesses beyond the first 5 years. Section 3 includes components such as the presentation of findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendation for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore managerial training strategies that small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years. In this section, I present my findings and discuss the themes and patterns that were identified. Also, I discuss applications to professional practice and implications for social change, personal reflections, recommendations for action and further research, and my conclusions.

My findings included three themes for successful strategies used by small retail business owners to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years: (a) updating the business model (b) addressing customer feedback, and (c) enhancing business efficiency. Each participant mentioned having an updated business model as a serious component to training strategies to sustain operations beyond the first 5 years. Participants reported that efficiency from managers and employees assists in the sustainability and competitive advantage for their business.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question for this study was: What managerial training strategies do small retail business owners apply to sustain business beyond the first 5 years? After interviewing small retail business owners who successfully sustained their operations beyond the first 5 years, I identified three themes that I present in the subsequent pages. The conceptual framework included systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950) and general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1972). In what follows, I define how the findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge, and connect the findings to the bconceptual framework used for this study. Table 2 includes demographic information regarding the three small retail business owners. The three participants had a combined total of 102 years of shared experience as business owners in the retail industry.

Table 2

Demographic Information About the Small Retail Business Owners

	Characteristics	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Business owner	Code name	PA1	PA2	PA3
	Highest level of education	Bachelor's degree	Junior year of college	Bachelor's degree
	Length in current organization	20 years	21 years	45 years
	Years of managerial experience as a business owner	29 years	28 years	45 years

As I stated in the introduction, the three themes were: (a) updating business model (b) addressing customer feedback, and (c) enhancing business efficiency. The answers to the interview questions that each participant provided were consistent with the conceptual framework, literature review findings, and triangulation, which assisted me in recognizing themes during data analysis.

Theme 1: Updating the Business Model

Updating the business model was a key factor that each participant believed was important to the implementation of training strategies to sustain operations. Each of the three business owners agreed that updating their business model works great for managers and staff because missions and visions of the organization can change. A business model provides stability for the growth of the organization while also providing clarity on the goals and missions of the organization. Bridgen (2017) explained that system theory is the right theory to view the strengths and weaknesses of systems based on goals and missions of small businesses. According to each participant, staying committed to achieving the goals and objectives helped to sustain a successful business. Some strategies included implementation of open systems such as in-house training, hands-on training which requires a social component, and role play.

The updating the business model theme confirms the findings of von Betalanffy (1972) that personalities, social groups, and technological strategies are components of systems. The theme was also aligned with the conclusions of Omri and Ayadi-Frikha (2014) that small businesses with high levels of activity (such those of each of my participants) are expected to grow. Businesses build their business models to be adaptive to changing environments as well as external factors. This approach was in line with the literature from Sindakis and Walter (2015) who suggested business model innovations are used to increase adaptability and responsiveness to changing conditions in a business. The triangulation of the data I collected from the interview and the brochure that "we have upgraded our facility to better service our customer" and "training and tenure, to me, are the greatest things that you can do to have a sustainable business model" supports the updating the business model theme. Thus, strategic alignments are critical for the survival and sustainability of small businesses, as are innovations that contribute to small business sustainability. Biloshapka and Osiyevskyy (2018) found that business model updates help to achieve higher revenue, better operating profit, and continued customer satisfaction. Table 3 includes direct statements from each participant related to their updated business model.

Table 3

Theme: Updating the Business Model

Participant	Participant's Comments
PA1	Also, we must keep our business model current. What worked years ago with our model may not work now. It may not allow us to be efficient in our goals and missions. The plan is updated regulary unless say we have major changes in the company.
PA2	One of the things that has really helped, to add to what we doing is we partner with UPS and we become an access point. And how that works with that is by us being an access point with UPS we provide a service. This is new change to our business plan. For UPS customers while we hold their packages, But what it does is in turn, it creates traffic flow for us….And it's always going to be the service but it has evolved differently. One of the things that, that I'm doing now that I didn't do when I first started back in '97 is that I'm taking advantage of the social media.
PA3	Well, we offer free delivery. We realized that many other companies were not offering that…so we have implemented that as part of our business plan and growth. And we give fast delivery, usually if you buy it now, we probably could deliver it tomorrow. We give fast service in delivery…. Some of them bought it today and we delivered it today.

Theme 2: Addressing Customer Feedback

All the business owners agreed that addressing customer feedback was relevant to the success and sustainability of their small business. Customer feedback gave owners insight on the service the customer received. Asking customers about their experience makes the customer aware that the business values their opinion and that their opinion is important. Lorenz (1963), one of the founding fathers of the chaos theory, held that small changes can be generated that lead to dramatic consequences. Customer feedback can be complex, and chaos theory helps owners understand what causes doubt or assurance for the customer. PA2 explained, “With me having a service business, you know, we want to make a lasting impression on everybody that comes in the door.” PA1 added, “Our customer’s give us feedback. You know, we survey our customers regularly.” Therefore, having the capability of calling on the system, customer included, increases the effectiveness of services rendered and promotes a healthy reputation (see Han & McKelvey, 2016).

The addressing customer feedback theme confirms von Betalanffy’s (1950) findings that social entities connect with the environment to determine if the output and feedback were effective. According to Sindakis and Walter (2015), owners of small businesses adapt and make changes when customer preferences change. Furthermore, these researchers noted that potential changes call for an increase in adaptability and responsiveness in a changing environment. Thus, this theme aligns with the systems theory in that owners understood the process of systems thinking and how recognizing problems within the environment led to heightened knowledge of how to resolve customer issues. In my exploration of the participants’ websites and interview data, I noted statements such as “it’s experiences like yours that really keep us motivated” and “we look forward to your next visit! Take care!” The triangulation of the data collected from the interview and the participating small retail businesses’ websites verified the addressing customer feedback theme. Han and McKelvey (2016) concluded that building trust with customers in small businesses was vital for survival and that demonstrating transparency promotes trust from customers in the community. Popescu (2018) presented new findings that reveal how customer feedback is used to improve small business products and services, entice more consumers, and offer a better understanding of consumer's behavior to ensure a better consumer experience. The author explored customer experiences through data science and artificial intelligence. Thus, the relevancy to my project is that customer service experiences can be derived from the different systems that are closely related to the conceptual framework. Table 4 includes direct statements from each participant related to customer feedback.

Table 4

Theme: Addressing Customer Feedback

Participant	Participant's Comments
PA1	And so one way we can figure out our effectiveness of our training is by what our customer's tell us. And so, we call them, we send them surveys, we get those results, we look at metrics, we look at, we monitor social media, we hire a company that just does that for us. You know, monitor, is always out there because we can't, I can't hire somebody full time to just sit there and look at Facebook and stuff.
PA2	Then there's also, our customer's give us feedback. You know, we survey our customers regularly. And so one way we can figure out our effectiveness of our training is by what our customer's tell us. And so, we call them, we send them surveys, we get those results, we look at metrics, we look at, we monitor social media, we hire a company that just does that for us.
PA3	Well, you have to, you have to learn the person, learn what they owe and what their interests are. Also, let them be a part, ask them what they would like to do.

Theme 3: Enhancing Business Efficiency

All participants for this study agreed that enhancing business efficiency was an important component to the sustainability of their business. PA1 stated, "training and tenure, to me, are the greatest, you know, things that you can do to have a sustainable business model." PA2 also stated, "a lot of those principles, I kind of employ here because I'm not going to say as you're working for me, you know, the things I'm going to ask you to do and I not going to expect you to do it the way I do it but I'm expecting you to know the standards of the way we do it. It's all a part of the effectiveness of my business." The enhancing business efficiency theme confirms the conclusions made by Han and McKelvey (2016) that business efficiency demonstrated by small businesses was by building networks, building responsible accountability, and building trust. A business's success is measured by the longevity of the business (Sandada & Mangwandi, 2015). Efficiency and productivity are both connected to produce higher levels of competitiveness. Each of these interdependent subsystems depends on the other system, which helped the participants business sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years (Mania-Singer, 2017).

To enhance business efficiency, businesses must take on certain risk to grow, especially when expanding the market (Gomes et al., 2015). In addition, without moderate cash flow, small businesses cannot be financially sustainable. The success of small businesses relies on the inventiveness of owners (Glaub et al., 2014). Also, enhancing business efficiency requires the execution of training strategies with their employees. The triangulation of the data collected from the interview and from the small businesses' website such as "looking forward to assisting you in ways in which match your product needs" and "research products to better assist you and to see what the inherent benefits are regarding efficiency" supports the business efficiency theme. Business efficiency has a direct connection to small business models, and most are based on organizational rules, practices, and constructions that will be unaffected by an ever-changing environment, causing businesses to demonstrate efficiency with a competitive advantage while customer preferences shift (Dentchev et al., 2016). All the participants emphasized the importance of evaluating employees and the level of service given to customers. Kasim, Haracic, & Haracic (2018) presented new research that reveals how business efficiency not only includes reducing cost and increasing revenues but includes an increase in the utilization rate of available resources, improving the work environment and customer satisfaction, and reducing damaging impacts of the business on the environment. Table 5 consist of a summary of statements made by each participant on business efficiency.

Table 5

Theme: Enhancing Business Efficiency

Participant	Participant's Comments
PA1	If you're constantly turning people over, there is no way to make money. It's impossible, All you doing is trying to figure out… you're chasing your own tail all the time trying to figure out what just happened. And we're doing a little of that right now. I've got a consultant here down there right now trying to help us that's why I mentioned it today. You know, we're doing a little of that, we got a new guy, we're trying to bring him along, train him, he needs to have his opportunity to be, to learn. But he doesn't know everything. And so, a guy who's been there twenty years, you know, knows all, all the stuff that he needs to do to do it. Yeah, so it makes a huge difference.
PA2	And so, so, if you're in business and you're not making no money, then you got to sit back and you got to evaluate, get your managers there, you got to evaluate and see what it is that you're doing wrong…You know, because somethings not right. It's not running the way it needs to run efficiently to make money. Because the overall goal and objective of any business is to make a profit.

PA3	They're trying to see how it can be best done and they take their time to talk with the person that they're trying to do it for. And if they can't do it, then they thank them anyway or if we can't do it we thank them anyway. If someone called and we don't have the services, we just tell them that we appreciate them calling and that we don't offer that.

Applications to Professional Practice

The result of the study could prove valuable to current and future owners of small retail businesses for executing training strategies to increase the sustainability of their operations. Small retail businesses can utilize the findings from this study to improve their business performance. The findings of the study consist of three underlying themes: (a) updating the business model, (b) addressing customer feedback, and (c) enhancing business efficiency. The findings and conclusions from the study can assist small retail business owners in increasing business efficiency and ultimately the sustainability of their company. In the systems theory, the owner actions allowed for evaluation between parts of a system and also allowed for the exploration of relationships within the small business (von Betalanffy, 1972). In the chaos theory, small retail business owners were permitted to develop sound decisions which added to the success of the small business, in both internal and external environments (Thamizhchelvy & Geetha, 2015). Small retail business owners must understand the needs of their business, level of relationships among the different structures on various levels, and the interrelations of the business activities to sustain their business (Haye et al., 2018). Some small business owners will tolerate disorganization to avoid closure and promote self-governance over multiple operations to make them work for the betterment of the business (Haye et al., 2018).

Current and future small retail business owners could implement training strategies to improve sustainability and business efficiency beyond the first 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could help improve the sustainability and business efficiency of small retail businesses. Increasing sustainability among small retail business could cause an increase in employment rates, which may produce revenue at local and state levels. Although business failures may diminish, it does not mean a complete solution, but sustainability increase could produce optimistic outlooks and impact on many families in the economy. The result of the study can help close the gaps in knowledge of what training strategies to develop and implement for small retail business owners.

The objective for sustainability is to magnify the values that can assist with building a complete picture of the world we live in and the one we plan for to enhance the viability of small retail businesses (Hale et al., 2017). The findings from the study could contribute to social change by assisting other small retail business owners implement training strategies that increase sustainability which can lead to greater profitability and success.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small retail business owners implemented to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend some actions that current and future small retail business owners can utilize to increase their sustainability strategies to increase their business efficiency and profitability. The business owners must understand three key problems for persuading their success: (a) updating the business model, (b) addressing customer feedback, and (c) enhancing business efficiency.

First, keep an updated business model for the business. Carayannis et al. (2015) explored the importance of business model innovation in efforts to increase organizational sustainability. An updated business model should be updated once a year unless there are major changes taking place within the business. An updated business model will help owners, managers, and staff stays on track with the vision and goals of the business. It is critical to develop and analyze a concrete plan of action for sales, marketing, and manufacturing which aids in the productivity and efficiency of the business (Bocken et al., 2014).

Second, give value to customer feedback. Customer feedback is effective when the owners, manager, and staff pay close attention to the needs of the customer. Developing relationships with customers promote satisfaction. Create and develop customer feedback notifications by way of website input, email address, text message, or home address. Once responses are received each month, customer's responses should be inputted into a database to collectively determine areas that need improvement and areas that are excelling. Developing relationships help to build trust and gain confidence. If customers have a bad experience, they may not return to the business which can jeopardize the business sustainability. A single error from a small business in the mistreatment of a customer can be detrimental for small businesses (Gomes et al., 2015). Third, promote business efficiency within the organization. Small business owners must evaluate employee productivity. Employee productivity can be measured by reviewing job performance. Ansari and Bijalwan (2017) found that the longevity of the employees influenced their decision to stay in the business which influences team efficiency and effectiveness. Also, stay up-to-date on the latest technology which can promote productivity within the business.

Nevertheless, business efficiency can also be achieved by recognizing processes that are inefficient in the business model. Mastering this process can lead to the development and implementation of training strategies that owners can use. As a bonus for small retail businesses owners, achieving business efficiency help save time and money. Increasing business efficiency in business operations can also help to minimize the number of materials used to produce goods and maximize the amount of work by employees. I intend to publish the study and share findings with other business owners in small retail businesses, colleges and universities, and business settings where business owners discuss strategies related to business sustainability.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study on the strategies that small retail business owners implemented to sustain their operations beyond the first five years. The strategies found are (a) updating the business model (b) addressing customer feedback, and (c) enhancing business efficiency. The population of this study consisted of three cases in the southeastern region of the United States. This study had one primary limitation, and that was that the results could not be generalizable to all businesses in all settings. Thus, to generalize the findings, future researchers should consider conducting the study in a medium to large size business industry. In addition, future researchers can use a mixed research method and involve interviews with a much larger population. The quantitative research method can also be useful to test hypotheses and the correlation between the given themes and training strategies recognized in this study. Quantitative research can also be used to yield larger data analysis and to compare the external validity to different environments.

Reflections

As a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) scholar, my journey has been informative and one of self-direction. This journey has required commitment and discipline. In this study, I explored the managerial strategies that small retail business owners implement to sustain their operations beyond the first 5 years. I had an opportunity to conduct research and learn how to solve the business problem. I gained insight from the experienced business owners as well as gained knowledge and skills. The research process was a great experience, however, getting participants to participate promptly was quite a challenge. Over 50% of the business owners that I contacted did not participate due to workload, out of town travel, and conflicts in scheduling. I had to develop a good relationship with the participants that consented to participate. Building relationships was important due to member checking, which requires a follow-up visit. I reinforced to each participant what their rights are and the confidentiality level for their private information. If the participants were not comfortable, I wouldn’t have been successful in the interview process. The interview protocol helped me to stay on track with asking each participant the same questions. Follow-up questions were different and contingent upon the participant's original answers. The transcription of the interviews was labor intense.

My mind became stimulated after hearing the responses of the participants on their knowledge of the strategies that were used to sustain their operation. My experience interviewing the small retail business owners increased my knowledge of what it takes to have a successful business. I am inspired and motivated to be a successful leader and run my own business in the future.

Conclusion

Although many small businesses are established each year, about 75% of new small and medium enterprises do not become formal businesses (Thandukwazi & Robert, 2018). Managerial training strategies are a critical aspect of small retail business success. Small retail businesses do not always sustain their operations due to financial and personnel issues. Sustaining and growing small retail businesses require having the right managerial strategies which are a result of small businesses implementing strategies for improved business efficiency and profitability. Implementation of strategies can also inspire growth and performance as they are dependent on each other. Owners of small businesses invest a significant amount of capital to start and develop their business. Bridgen (2017) suggested looking at systems or organizations in a holistic view because the strengths and weaknesses can be revealed based on the organization's current missions and goals. Additionally, human capital investments can increase employee effectiveness as well as improve the overall health of business operations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduce the interview to the participants and explain the purpose and scope of the research study. Reassure the participants that all information collected will be kept confidential, ask that I record the interview session, and advise participants of the right to stop the interview at any time.

The questions for the interview are:

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. How long have you been in your current position?
5. How many total years of managerial experience do you have?

Strategic Research Questions

1. How do you assess the effectiveness of your organization's managerial training strategies and derivative programs?
2. What types of manager training initiatives are most effective?
3. How often do managers engage in training?
4. How responsive are managers to training?
5. What benefits do trained managers have on business performance and sustainability?
6. How does managerial training help you to retain employees?

7. What additional information can you provide to help me understand the training strategies and programs that are relevant to your organization's success during the first 5 years of operations?

Finish the interview and thank the participant. Schedule a follow-up for member checking interview session.

Follow-up and Member Checking Interview

Introduce follow-up interview in person.

Give a copy of the combination for each question and interpretation.

Ask participant questions related to information that I discovered during the interview and related to research topic

After going through each question, I will ask: Did I miss anything? Or, is there anything else you would like to add?

Finalize the follow-up session and thank the participant.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The questions for the interview are as follows:

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. How long have you been in your current position?
5. How many total years of managerial experience do you have?

Strategic Research Questions

6. How do you assess the effectiveness of your organization's managerial training strategies and derivative programs?
7. What types of manager training initiatives are most effective?
8. How often do managers engage in training?
9. How responsive are managers to training?
10. What benefits do trained managers have on business performance and sustainability?
11. How does managerial training help you to retain employees?
12. What additional information can you provide to help me understand the training strategies and programs that are relevant to your organization's success during the first 5 years of operations?